Theatre encompasses the globe

By Maximilian Burkhart

LMU researchers Christopher Balme and Nic Leonhardt are tracing the international cross-currents that stirred the history of theater, and forged surprising intercultural links, during earlier phases of globalization.

For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2014/02_01.pdf

UCB’s open door to visiting professorship is perfect timing

by Elizabeth Willoughby

University of California, Berkeley professors have been conducting research at LMU in a special Humanities Research program since 2007, but it was earlier this year when the program began to flow in both directions, sending its first LMU professor west to California.

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Contemporary China on camera: Munich’s Chinese Film Festival

by Kerstin Meierhöfer

The best way to grasp China’s dimensions is to take to the road. So this year the Chinese Film Festival in Munich gave us a tour of contemporary China as seen by its film directors. The route took in examples of genres like the sensitive drama, the romantic comedy and the classical thriller.

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Reflections on Lagerfeld

by Anja Burkel

From society reporter to art historian: At the age of 69, journalist Lothar Strobach returned to university – to write a dissertation on fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld’s career as a photographer.

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Just as LMU’s classical archaeologist, Prof Rolf Schneider, was preparing to write his part of a co-authored book, UCB opened its doors to host a visiting professor from LMU. The timing couldn’t have been better for Prof Schneider, since being accepted would provide him with experts in the field, UCB’s libraries with their remarkable range of cultural historical reading on South Africa, and time to research and write his first draft.

“From memory to marble: the frieze of the Voortrekker Monument at Pretoria” will be about the making and reading of one of the largest marble friezes in the world. The historical frieze was created to commemorate the centenary of the 1838 Great Trek, when 15,000 pioneers left the then British Cape to trek into the interior to found independent Afrikaner republics. Since 2010, Prof Schneider and his co-author, Prof Rankin, have been uncovering unpublished drawings, plaster models made in preparation for the frieze, and some 4,000 mostly unpublished documents in South African archives, including minutes of the Monument’s committee meetings. From 2D paper designs to 3D stone carvings, their findings will provide fascinating insight into the original intentions versus a re-contextualized post-apartheid setting.

Acceptance of Prof Schneider’s application to UCB brought him back together with his Berkeley colleague, Prof Christopher H Hallett from the History of Art Department. Both work in the field of Roman sculpture – Prof Hallett’s focus on exceptional portraits from Aphrodisias in southwestern Turkey, Prof Schneider’s on portrayals of non-Romans, including a spectacular group of colored-marble statues in Rome showing Trojans with origins also in Anatolia. The four months at Berkeley were exactly what he needed to raise to a new level his scholarly dialogue with Prof Hallett about problems of imagery, architecture and marble, topics pertinent for his book. The professors’ talks revealed that they had many mutual research interests, and have resulted in a formal collaboration and an invitation from the Humanities research program for Prof Hallett to visit LMU for six months in 2015.

Creating partnerships

Also writing a joint article with Prof Stewart from Berkeley, Prof Schneider feels that the different academic traditions of American universities have made his work better. “It is the difference that enables competing ideas to be more articulated, challenged and changed,” he says.

Living off campus has promoted contact with the world around UCB, but so have professors and students. “I have been wonderfully integrated in activities,” says Prof Schneider, “joining excursions including oyster bakes and wine tasting. One colleague even took me sailing. Berkeley, the Bay area and San Francisco are very beautiful, with world class opera, theatre and music, museums and architecture, excellent wine and cuisine, and a high tech industry. For the first time I have ridden in a Tesla S electric sedan!”

The program’s visiting professors at LMU are equally appreciative of such elements. Just finishing a six-month stay in Munich, UCB’s Prof Paolo Mancosu had applied in order to take advantage of LMU’s Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy to finish his book “Abstraction and Infinity” on counting infinite collections and abstractionist philosophy of mathematics.

Having access to colleagues at LMU with interest in his areas of work, a center for mathematical philosophy that he calls an intellectual power house, an excellent library and the Center for Advanced Studies where he also gave a talk inaugurating the Berkeley Lecture series at LMU, Prof Mancosu was able to write, exchange ideas and expand his social and academic contacts. “There are so many things going on and so many people to talk to,” he says, “that I could not have hoped for a more vibrant Center to visit.”

The LMU-UCB Research in the Humanities program aims to inspire innovative, collaborative research in the humanities through the exchange of professors, PhDs and postdocs. www.en.lmu.de/about_lmu/international_net/coop_excellent/berkeley
Contemporary China on camera: Munich’s Chinese Film Festival
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The best way to grasp China’s dimensions is to take to the road. So this year the Chinese Film Festival in Munich gave us a tour of contemporary China as seen by its film directors. The route took in examples of genres like the sensitive drama, the romantic comedy and the classical thriller.

Outside, it is a tranquil summer evening in Munich. Inside, on the screen, the chilling blast of winter winds in China’s northern steppes takes one’s breath away, and a mysterious series of murders has investigators on edge. A police inspector who has been suspended from duty circles the figure of the woman who is at the center of the enquiry – and becomes caught up in a tangled story of love, seduction and madness. The organizers of this year’s Chinese Film Festival were able to show “Black Coal, Thin Ice”, directed by Diao Yinan, before it went on general release in Germany. The film had won the Golden Bear for the best production (and a Silver Bear for the Best Actor) at the 2014 Berlin Film Festival. – And, in spite of the ideal beer-garden weather outside, the movie attracted so many film buffs to the basement cinema at the Metropol that a second theater was needed to accommodate the crowd.

“Crossing China”

The first Chinese Film Festival in Munich was the brainchild of a group made up of five lecturers, students and alumni of LMU’s Institute of Sinology, and was held in 2013. The response encouraged them to put together a second edition this year. The goal of the Festival is to build bridges and establish connections, not only by presenting the work of major Chinese film-makers to the German public, but also by showing – side by side – examples of various genres dealing with diverse issues and themes.

The notion of presenting in Munich a short festival devoted to films from China came up more than a year ago: Katharina Cvitic, then a student at the Institute of Sinology, was in the throes of writing her Master’s thesis on the work of Zhang Yimou and the Martial Arts film in general when it occurred to her that one could create a platform for such films and make them accessible to a wider circle of enthusiasts. This year she and her collaborators – Anna Stecher, Rebecca Ehrenwirth, Sebastian Michlick and Louise Raasch – selected the motto “Crossing China” for the Festival, and decided to focus on recent productions.

A passion for the cinema

As well as attending to the exigencies of their studies, research work and/or job, the five organizers somehow found the time to put together a five-day festival program, obtain licences to screen the films chosen, and persuade academic specialists to participate in discussion panels. They received invaluable support not only from the Institute of Sinology at LMU, but also from the Confucius Institute and the Monopol Cinema, where all the films were shown. “It was a great experience for us”, says Sebastian Michlick, who is studying Sinology and describes himself as a passionate cinéaste. As for LMU-alumna Louise Raasch, she not only regards herself as fortunate to have learned so much during the project, it also got her career off to a good start – she landed a job with the Filmfest München. Anna Stecher and Rebecca Ehrenwirth, both researchers at the Institute of Sinology, are pleased to have inspired so much enthusiasm for Chinese cinema – not only in their students, but in movie-goers of all age groups in Munich.

“Many of the films we showed didn’t have a German distributor,” says Anna Stecher. “And some of them had topped the movie charts in China. These films give us particular insight into Chinese mentality and identity – and so provide an important key to understanding this complex society,” Rebecca Ehrenwirth adds.

In the end, the Festival drew more than 500 movie-goers to the Monopol Cinema to see an intriguing selection of films from China. “Lots of students have already asked us what they can expect next year,” says a very happy Anna Stecher. All in all, it looks as if this small, but exquisite showcase of Chinese cinema could well establish itself as a fixture in Munich’s rich cultural calendar.

Translation: Paul Hardy
Under the eye of the Fourth Estate
By Hubert Filser

Western media often see their task as that of an independent monitor of the political sphere. How true is this of the press elsewhere? LMU’s Thomas Hanitzsch, coordinator of a worldwide survey of journalists’ attitudes to their role, has the answer. For the complete article, see www.en.lmu.de/news/insightlmu/2014/02_02.pdf

Archaeopteryx plumage

First show off, then take-off

The eleventh specimen of the iconic “basal bird” Archaeopteryx so far discovered turns out to have the best preserved plumage of all. It is being subjected to a thorough examination by a team led by Dr. Oliver Rauhut, a paleontologist in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at LMU Munich, who is also affiliated with the Bavarian State Collection for Paleontology and Geology in Munich. “Comparisons with other feathered predatory dinosaurs indicate that the plumage in the different regions of the body varied widely between these species. That suggests that primordial feathers did not evolve in connection with flight-related roles, but originated in other functional contexts,” says Dr. Christian Foth of LMU and the Bavarian State Collection for Paleontology and Geology in Munich.

Predatory dinosaurs with body plumage are now known to predate Archaeopteryx, and their feathers probably provided thermal insulation. Advanced species of predatory dinosaurs and primitive birds with feathered forelimbs may have used them as balance organs when running, like ostriches do today. Moreover, feathers could have served useful functions in brooding, camouflage or display. Although it is very likely that Archaeopteryx was also capable of flight. “Interestingly, the lateral feathers in the tail of Archaeopteryx had an aerodynamic form, and most probably played an important role in its aerial abilities,” says Foth.

The researchers have been able to clarify the taxonomical relationship between Archaeopteryx and other species of feathered dinosaur. Here, the diversity in form and distribution of the feather tracts is particularly striking. “If feathers had evolved originally for flight, functional constraints should have restricted their range of variation. And in primitive birds we do see less variation in wing feathers than in those on the hind-limbs or the tail,” explains Foth.

These observations imply that feathers acquired their aerodynamic functions secondarily: Once feathers had been invented, they could be co-opted for flight. “It is even possible that the ability to fly evolved more than once within the theropods,” says Rauhut.

Brighter white

LMU chemists have developed a novel type of red phosphor material, which significantly enhances the performance of white-emitting LEDs. “The new material has the potential to revolutionize the LED market,” says Wolfgang Schnick, Professor of Inorganic Solid-State Chemistry at LMU Munich. A single LED can produce light of only one color tone. However, Schnick and his team had previously achieved a notable technological breakthrough by synthesizing innovative phosphor materials that allowed the blue light produced by conventional LEDs to be converted into all the colors of the visible spectrum. Mixing of the different colors results in high-quality white light and this invention earned Schnick a nomination for the German Future Prize 2013. “The problem with commercially available white-light LEDs is that there is always a trade-off between optimal energy efficiency and acceptable color rendition” says Schnick. The red-emitting phosphor materials so far used are the principal factor responsible for this, because they have a particularly significant influence on the so-called color rendering index. The new material developed by Schnick in cooperation with Dr. Peter Schmidt of Philips GmbH is based on the nitride Sr[LiAlN4]. When doped with an appropriate amount of europium the compound displays intensive luminescence over a very narrow range of frequencies in the red band. Peak emission occurs at wavelengths of around 650 nm and peak width (full width at half-maximum) is only 50 nm. The first prototype LEDs incorporating the new material generate 14% more light than conventional white-light LEDs and have an excellent color rendering index. “With its unique luminescence properties the new material surpasses all red-emitting phosphors yet employed in LEDs and has great potential for industrial applications” Schnick concludes.
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Lothar Strobach has often run into Karl Lagerfeld, though not “in personam”, but “as an icon, an unmistakable presence, in newspapers and magazines – and in the minds of fashion-conscious women in Vietnam, Thailand and Russia.” – Mind you, this quote does not occur in any of the magazines that Strobach edited for Burda, one of Germany’s largest publishers, it comes the preface of his doctoral thesis. For at the end of his career as an observer of the rich and famous, Strobach has written about Lagerfeld from a different angle – in his thesis for LMU.

Parallels between Warhol and Lagerfeld

Dr. Lothar Strobach is sitting in a café near the University. On the table is his dissertation, entitled “The Photographer Karl Lagerfeld. In Search of Lost Beauty: Parallels and Contrasts with his Artistic alter ego Andy Warhol”.

“I initially wanted to write about flower power in Munich more than 40 years ago,” says Strobach, now 73. “Those were the days!” But then he discovered the catalog of an exhibition in the Albertina in Vienna in 2006: “Popstars – Drawings and Collages by Andy Warhol”, which he also has with him. “Few people realize that Lagerfeld and Warhol were born only 5 years apart, Warhol in 1928, Lagerfeld in 1933.” And right up to the time of Warhol’s death, they met frequently. Warhol visited Lagerfeld in Paris, Lagerfeld was often in Warhol’s ‘Factory’ in New York. “In 1970, in Lagerfeld’s home on the Rue Saint-Sulpice, Warhol made the film ‘L’Amour’ – in which Lagerfeld plays himself – with Patti d’Arbanville and Donna Jordan, the most famous ‘it girls’ of the day. During shooting breaks, Lagerfeld and Warhol put on their roller skates and ran rings around the haute bourgeoisie promenading under the Eiffel Tower.”

The catalog with Mick Jagger on the cover, a mutual friend of Warhol and Lagerfeld, prompted Strobach to change direction and make the artistic links between “emperor Karl” and the god of pop art the subject of his thesis. “I wanted to do a PhD after I finished my Master’s thesis. But, at 28, I was worried that I might never get around to earning any money, because I couldn’t expect anything from home. My father had been killed in Stalingrad, and my mother lived on a modest widow’s pension.” So instead of taking the next step on the academic ladder, Strobach found himself a job.

Forty years on, he caught up on what he hadn’t been able to do then. Before being accepted as a doctoral student by his eventual supervisor at the Institute of Art History, Professor Rainer Crone (the external assessor was Barbara Vinken, Professor of French Literature at LMU), Strobach had to successfully complete four graduate seminars. Did he perhaps feel out of place among students much younger than himself? “Not at all,” he says. So how much Warhol is there in Lagerfeld? Strobach devotes some two-thirds of his thesis to this issue, and points to striking parallels between the two. For example, Warhol once said: “I want to be a machine.” Lagerfeld has said: “I am a machine.” And Warhol’s dictum: ‘If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.’ is also echoed by Lagerfeld. During a photo-session with Annie Leibowitz, Lagerfeld said to her: ‘Annie, look at what you see. There’s nothing behind it.’ Moreover, much of Warhol’s oeuvre in the 1960s and 70s has influenced Lagerfeld’s photographic work. Seventeen years after Warhol’s death, Lagerfeld brought out a kind of carrying-case containing a seven-volume selection of the best work from Warhol’s magazine “Interview”. Here, he adopts the role of Warhol’s literary executor, as it were.

Only after the submission of his 255-page dissertation did the author actually meet his subject personally. Strobach waited for 3 hours in Lagerfeld’s Paris studio on the Rue de Lille before the designer appeared. But then, “He hugged me and said: ‘Now you think you know all about me?’ – ‘Academically, perhaps,’ Strobach replied, a trifle nervously …

Translation: Paul Hardy
New online course format: “Self-paced” MOOCs

A year ago, LMU made its first set of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) available on the Internet. The venture has proven to be highly successful. So far, approximately 320,000 in more than 200 countries have taken part in one of the five online courses offered by LMU. All the courses can be accessed on Coursera, currently the largest platform for MOOCs internationally, and the one with most thematically diverse program. LMU is now participating in the development of a new online course format with Coursera. The new MOOC format now under development, the Self-paced Online Course, is designed to cater for students who would prefer to acquaint themselves with their chosen topic in their own time and at their own speed. Only three universities worldwide are now providing courses in this new format: Stanford University, Ohio State University – and LMU. Thus, LMU’s introductory course on “Competitive Strategy”, designed and presented by Professor Tobias Kretschmer, is now accessible to registered users in the new form. The course content has been appropriately adapted and reconfigured into six modules, each lasting for about an hour.

Huber passes baton to new LERU Chairman

At a meeting of the Rectors and Presidents of the universities that make up the League of European Research Universities (LERU), held in Helsinki in May, LMU President Professor Bernd Huber formally handed over the office of Chairman of the consortium, which he had occupied for the past 6 years, to his designated successor, Professor Alain Beretz, President of the Université de Strasbourg. LMU was one of the founding members of LERU, an association of 21 leading, research-intensive European universities. LERU’s aim is to contribute to the shaping of higher education and research policies in the EU, to ensure that European universities are provided with an environment that optimally nurtures excellence in teaching and research. “It has been an exciting and challenging time for me, particularly with regard to LERU’s intensive involvement in the discussions surrounding the design of the Horizon 2020 program,” Huber recalls. “I have always regarded it as an honor to work on behalf of the leading research universities in Europe for the achievement of our common objectives – the creation of a single European Research Area and the provision of an assured source of long-term financing for the support of basic research, because research is the basis of all innovation.”

– And Huber has every intention of continuing to pursue these goals at various levels in the future.

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